

Next Tuesday, July 24th, millions of Americans and almost a million workers in Texas will get a pay raise for the first time since 1997. It has been 10 years since Americans have seen an increase in the federal minimum wage. Over the past decade, the effect of the 1997 raise has been all but erased, leaving millions of families in poverty. When adjusted for inflation, the minimum wage today is at its lowest level in more than half a century. Texans have been disproportionately impacted because we have the lowest minimum wage allowed by federal law - \$5.15 per hour.

Nationwide, raising the federal minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour will benefit nearly 13 million hard-working Americans, including over 2.3 million Hispanics and over 2 million African-Americans. Here in Texas, 863,000 workers will see a direct increase in their hourly pay and 1,771,000 workers overall will benefit from the raise over the next two years. This pay raise will help families who live paycheck to paycheck at a time when they are experiencing record prices at the pump, skyrocketing health care costs, and the rising cost of college tuition.

The effects of the increased minimum wage are far greater for families than they are for individual workers. A full-time minimum wage worker making \$5.15 an hour brings home \$10,712 a year, an annual income barely above the federal poverty level for an individual. These numbers mask even more bleak circumstance for the entire family. Nearly half of low-wage workers in families with children are the sole breadwinner for their household, leaving their family nearly \$6,000 below the federal poverty level for a family of three.

Raising the minimum wage is about more than just economics; it is about valuing our families. This raise will help 7.4 million women and 3.3 million parents. About 6 million children will see their parents' income rise. This pay raise is also critical to the families making the supreme sacrifice for our nation. Some 50,000 military families will benefit from an increase in the minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour. The overall increase of \$2.10 an hour will give families like these an additional \$4,400 a year to meet critical needs. That's 15 months of groceries, over two years of health care, 19 months of utilities, or 20 months of child care.

I believe an honest day's work deserves a fair day's pay. On July 24 we will take the first step as a nation to ensure that millions of hardworking Americans and their families will earn what they deserve.

Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) is a Member of the exclusive House Appropriations Committee.

#